

Measure 3: State and county ratings in emergency preparedness

Target: The state emergency management program will become the first such program to receive national accreditation. Targets for county emergency management programs will be developed once current preparedness levels have been assessed.

The North Carolina Division of Emergency Management leads state and local agencies in helping citizens prepare for, respond to, and mitigate against injury and damage resulting from natural disasters and other emergencies. Its emergency response plan has been tested with some regularity as hurricanes have threatened or hit the state's coast each year since 1995. In an effort to ensure that the state is prepared for any type of disaster or emergency, North Carolina takes part in two complementary programs for assessing readiness. Both cover a range of components from crisis communications and finance to fire and rescue response. Other emergencies including natural disasters, hazardous material releases, and terrorism are also covered.¹⁹⁴

From readiness to accreditation

FEMA requires the state to conduct a "capabilities assessment of readiness" every other year that is supervised by the federal agency. North Carolina takes the additional step of conducting the assessment on its own during alternate years. For the past two years the state's readiness has been rated 3.96 and 4.1 on a scale of 1 to 5.¹⁹⁵

The Division of Emergency Management also is scheduled to be evaluated for national accreditation by its professional peers this fall. The accreditation standards, the NFPA 1600 Standard on Disaster/Emergency Management and Business Continuity Programs, which took effect February 1, 2000, were developed cooperatively by the National Fire Protection Association, FEMA, the National Emergency Management Association, and the International Association of Emergency Managers. North Carolina could become the first state in the country to win accreditation.^{196 197}

Local government emergency capacity

To improve emergency preparedness at the local level, the Division of Emergency Management and the N.C. Emergency Management Association have been developing an assessment tool similar to FEMA's for local governments. The tool is intended to be used in establishing a state minimum standard and to help local officials direct resources appropriately. In 1999, about a quarter of the state's counties participated in a voluntary demonstration of the assessment tool. Of the nine functional areas examined, participating counties received average scores of 75 percent or better on categories dealing with immediate response. Scores were significantly lower on recovery measures and lowest of all (46 percent) in mitigating the impact of future emergencies or disasters.¹⁹⁸ A few more counties have taken the assessment since the initial demonstration. All 100 counties have emergency management plans.¹⁹⁹